

THE MARTYRDOM
OF
FATHER COIGLEY

A TRAGIC EPISODE OF '98

BY
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A TRAGIC EPISODE.

DR. INGRAM, in his famous ballad, suggestively asks, "Who fears to speak of '98?" Most certainly Ireland does not. Already vigorous preparations are being made there and elsewhere to give becoming celebration to the century-anniversary of that memorable year. What form those preparations may finally assume need not now occupy attention. Without in the remotest way encroaching on the functions of any of the many committees appointed to give shape and voice to the feelings and wishes of the Irish people throughout the world, it may not be out of place at the present moment to reprint one of the more remarkable occurrences of that lamentable time. The leading events of the "Rising" are no doubt familiar to the students of history, but surrounding all such upheavals of the popular will there are invariably incidents—painful and distressing, or noble and glorious it may be—which somehow or other escape publicity for some time, but ultimately come to us as revelations, throwing round the sad past a greater brilliancy than had been apportioned to them by the earlier narrators. That the Irish Rebellion of '98 is no exception to this will be abundantly proved by the strange facts which are contained in the following sketch.

The astounding story of Father Coigley and his compatriots does not appear, in detail at least, in some of the histories of the Revolt. This most probably is

attributable to the circumstance that their action was confined to England. It would be an error to imagine that they have been left unnoticed. On the contrary, the martyr-priest and his persecutions have been most amply treated in several memoirs by some of Ireland's most capable friends. Prominent among these may be mentioned Valentine Lord Cloncurry's "Personal Recollections." His Lordship was Father Coigley's great and true friend, and has placed on record that he considered "him the finest person he ever saw." In the "Lives and Times of the United Irishmen" Dr. Richard R. Madden also did ample justice to the patriot priest. In Lord Holland's "Memoirs of the Whig Party" he has been singled out for special vindication. Horace Twiss in his "Life of Lord Eldon," who figured in the trial, gives the Irish priest particular notice. Facts can also be drawn from the most authentic sources, including the Reports of the English State Trials, the "Annual Register" of the period, Denver's book "The Irish in Britain." This list might be considerably increased, but sufficient has been stated to prove that Father Coigley has not been forgotten by at least some writers, enemies as well as friends.

He and his companions were tried at Maidstone, and the priest laid down his life for his native land on a common gallows, the victim it is to be feared of a combination of perjury, a packed jury, and a partizan judge, gloriously attesting his belief in the patriot's creed, that

Whether on the gallows high,
Or in the battle's van,
The fittest place for man to die,
Is where he dies for man.

Most truthfully this execution was, pure and simple, a "judicial murder," as Lord Chancellor Thurloe pronounced it at the time. But the "murder" was accompanied by the infliction of cruelties on the condemned,

which for malignant ingenuity were unsurpassed in modern times. It is authoritatively recorded that he was dragged from the prison to the gallows, a considerable distance, on a rude, unwheeled hurdle, drawn by two half-harnessed horses, through the principal streets of Maidstone, a degrading exhibition to gratify hundreds of half sober citizens. But the priest never winced; even to the hangman who stood beside him on the hurdle armed with the rope and the cap he was considerate and polite, nobly bearing himself as a man, and, as his great Prototype had taught him, forgiving his slayers. On the "gallows high" he was still calm, collected, courageous—the Priest, the Patriot—and when he gave the signal to the hangman, the bolt was instantaneously withdrawn, and the pure, undefiled soul went heavenward.

No further comment need be made on this truly tragic episode. He fell as became a priest and an Irishman. Strange to say his fellow-prisoner, Arthur O'Connor, was acquitted at Maidstone, and when subsequently he was tried at Dublin for the same offence, he was also acquitted.

Yet those who are most inimical to Father Coigley can only say he was one of O'Connor's tools. Why was there so remarkable a difference in their treatment by the English Courts? The only explanation is that the Government knowing the power of the Irish clergy wished to deter them from taking part in the organisation by making one striking example.

The orthography of Father Coigley's name varies in several places. It is given as Quigley and O'Coigley. Some believe that he was a native of the County Louth. Others hold that he was born in Belfast, and his desire to have "a stone" inscribed with his name "put up" in that city gives colour to this belief. He was "a child" of the Archdiocese of Armagh, the cathedral city of Ulster, and, as such, was appointed to the

chaplaincy of the County prison at Dundalk early in his mission. As a clergyman he was beloved by all who knew him, the zealous friend of the poor and the afflicted, and unswerving in his devotion to his country.

His epitaph, like Emmet's, is not yet written, but when a grateful country awakens to discharge the obligation, on the humble "stone" in Belfast may be inscribed:—

"He served his country
And loved his kind."

The confidence reposed in him as a priest brought him into close association with the leaders of the day, and thus he became cognizant of the national movement for uniting all Irishmen in one organisation to "right the wrongs" of their common country. Father Coigley, however, was not without enemies—enemies vengeful, powerful and unscrupulous—the Orangemen, and his zeal as a clergyman and a patriot excited their active hostility. Twice they had assaulted his father's residence with the avowed object of compelling him to abjure his religion. They were, however, frustrated, and the son, no doubt, became the object of their increased malignity. It is, therefore, not improbable that his cruel fate was the offspring of their determined antipathy.

THE MISSION TO FRANCE.

It is stated in several of the histories of the Rebellion of 1798 that about the 1st of January, Arthur O'Connor was commissioned by his brother-leaders of the United Irishmen to proceed to France, through England, and ask active assistance of the Republic. On his way he was also to ascertain the progress made by the London Correspondence Society, a club affiliated with the United Irishmen, and consisting almost entirely of Irishmen resident in that metropolis. With O'Connor—or as he preferred to call himself Colonel

Morris—on this, at that time dangerous, mission, went his so-styled servant, James Allen. O'Connor was gone about three weeks when Father James Coigley left Dublin also, travelling as Captain "Jones," with a companion, Jeremiah Leary. They stopped for a time at Manchester, reaching London about the middle of February.

The headquarters of the London Society were at 14 Plough-court, Fetter-lane, and it was here in one room that the priest and his two companions (for he had been joined by Allen) lay concealed, O'Connor lodging meanwhile at Stratton-street, Piccadilly. The delegates were perhaps careless in their talk, for in a very short time the Government became acquainted with their whereabouts. O'Connor hearing of this, no doubt from some of his influential political friends, determined to leave London. On February 21st, with this end in view, he requested John Binns, the brother of the secretary of the club, to proceed to Whitstable, a small port on the Kentish coast about 60 miles distant, and there engage a vessel to convey himself and his friends to France. Binns left London on the same day, travelling to Gravesend in a barge, or hoy, as it was then termed. Thence he took the coach to Rochester. The next day he was at Canterbury trying to find an acquaintance who could introduce him to somebody in the contraband trade. On the 23rd he obtained an introduction to Kean Mahony, who was closely connected with this traffic. By him he was told to go to Whitstable, and there he could have an interview with some people whose names were given him. These he saw, telling the fishermen that he had a share in a certain smuggling venture, and that his partners would want to be landed at Flushing; but no crew would venture to that port, which was at that time in the possession of the French army. Binns then suggested Havre or Calais, but the men still held back, as there

was on one side a probability of seeing the inside of an English prison, and on the other there was the danger of the French Fleet capturing them. As Binns was leaving in disgust a different party of men said they would venture, but the price they demanded was too high—viz., £300, which was to be deposited in a Canterbury bank to be paid them if their boat was detained, and £150 if they succeeded in landing their passengers safely. Binns after hearing this offer left for Canterbury to try to get another batch of introductions from the good-natured Irishman, Kean Mahony. This time it was to some people at Deal. Binns was understood to have succeeded in making arrangements to take the party across the Channel for £60; after this arrangement was concluded he went back to Canterbury to catch the London mail, in order to report to his superiors. Unfortunately he was too late, and when he arrived in London, on the evening of the next day, February 25th, he found that the four Irishmen, O'Connor, Coigley, Allen and Leary, had started for Whitstable. According to Lord Cloncurry Father Coigley travelled as O'Connor's secretary.

When the untiring Binns was assured of their flight, he rushed back to Canterbury and got there late in the afternoon of the 26th. He was persuaded by Mahony to stop the night, as the roads were infested with highwaymen. The next morning he mounted a horse, and went on to Whitstable, six miles off. On the road he met Father Coigley and Arthur O'Connor, and told them of his new arrangements. As O'Connor was in fear that they might be stopped, he suggested a division of the party, and that they should meet again at Margate, where Binns expected to get a boat still cheaper. After making various arrangements, Binns and O'Connor walked back to Canterbury, Father Coigley going on to the Whitstable inn at which they were stopping. On returning he had an unpleasant

experience, for Leary came out with the news that they had an unexpected visitor in the person of a revenue officer who was waiting to examine the baggage. Father Coigley went in and expressed surprise and pleasure at the visit; he apologised that he had the keys of only some of the boxes; these it is needless to say contained clothes and such like innocent articles. His manner so impressed Mr. King, the revenue officer, that he did not insist upon the other boxes being opened, and wished all the party "God speed."

When the landlord heard of their new destination, he told them to be very careful, as the locked boxes would be certainly examined at Margate. On his recommendation they employed a local carrier named Thomsett to convey their goods in his cart—the three Irishmen accompanying it on foot. They reached Margate late in the afternoon and secured rooms as arranged at the King's Head, then an unpretentious inn situated in the High-street. A very short time afterwards they were joined by O'Connor and Binns. After a hurried meal the three chiefs hastened down to the beach, but here Binns had even worse luck than at either Deal or Whitstable, for no crew would be persuaded to venture to sea for either love or money. In their eagerness they offered a large sum but without result. It was then determined to accept the offer of the Deal boatmen. Leary was sent after Thomsett to re-engage him to take their baggage to that town. Father Coigley, who was very fatigued, went to bed about 10 o'clock. The news of the liberal rewards offered by the *soi-disant* smugglers reached the ears of some Bow-street officers who happened to be in Margate, and who determined to arrest the strangers on suspicion the next day.

THE ARREST.

Before the morning dawned an energetic police spy rushed into the town with the news of the mission of

O'Connor's party. Accordingly at break of day the inn was surrounded. The officers arrested Binns on the stairs, Allen and Leary were found in a room in the lower part, and, on ascending, two constables entered a bed-room that was pointed out, and there found Father Coigley seated at breakfast. It was with great difficulty he was arrested, for he was a strong man and struggled with all his force, but what could a practically unarmed man do against four officers who were fully armed.

On searching him, they found in his breast pocket a curious serpentine dagger, which it was afterwards proved he had purchased in Capel-street, Dublin. Hearing the noise of the scuffle, Arthur O'Connor came into the room, and was also at once placed under arrest. Father Coigley thinking that his next meal would be problematic, asked leave to finish his breakfast. The request was granted subject to two soldiers remaining on guard in the room. Hanging on a chair was a heavy overcoat, with a dark collar, which figured often in the subsequent trial. Directly he had finished, Arthur O'Connor and he joined the other prisoners. When they had left the premises and were in the four post-chaises provided for them, the two officers, Revett and Fugon, and a Rochester attorney named Twopenny examined the baggage. In one of the locked boxes they found £950 in gold, with a memorandum that £97 of this belonged to "Captain Jones." In another box they also discovered a green and gold uniform, some arms, and the necessary ammunition, which was owned by the same gentleman. A cypher letter ascribed to Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and the key to it, was discovered in O'Connor's shaving box. The attorney put his hand in the pocket of the great coat and pulled out a dark green pocket book which contained a letter from "The Secret Committee of England to the Executive Directorate of France,"

inviting them in the most passionate terms to throw troops into England and Ireland simultaneously. The chief prisoners, directly they heard of this supposed discovery, protested that they had never even seen the document before. And it certainly seems questionable that representatives of the alleged Irish Republic should have in their possession such an epistle, knowing as O'Connor did in what danger they stood, and how important it was to prevent information falling into the hands of the enemy. (It may here be stated that two years afterwards Mr. Scott, one of the Counsel engaged in the case, in a communication to the "Sun" newspaper, asserted that this letter was placed in the coat, by way of a hoax, by Dr. Crossfield, a leading member of the London Correspondence Society).

Guarded by a company of light dragoons the party reached Canterbury, where they were lodged for the night in the jail. Reaching the metropolis on March 1st, they were immediately taken before the presiding magistrate at Bow-street. The hearing of the charge occupied five days. Sir Francis Burdett and Mr. Boswell offered to go bail for Arthur O'Connor, but their request was refused, and he was lodged each night in Tophill Fields Prison. I cannot discover to which prison Father Coigley was committed, for the authorities gave orders that the prisoners were to be separated. At length Mr. Force, the presiding magistrate, thought that a case had been made out, and he committed the prisoners for trial on a charge of high treason. They were sent on March 6th to the Tower of London, which was considered the only place strong enough to hold them. They were kept in Shakespeare's "melancholy tower" for a month and a day. On April 7th, therefore, they were removed from that stronghold to the Kent County Jail at Maidstone, at which now fever-stricken town the five men were to go through the ordeal

of a state trial which would be enough to strike terror into the hearts of the bravest.

A special commission was to try them, and three of the leading judges were to be specially sent down from London to hear the case.

On April 12th the grand jury returned a true bill against the prisoners, and appointed May 21st for the trial.

THE TRIAL.

When that day arrived a great crowd assembled in the Court House, largely composed of politicians of the Whig party, who at that time were strongly in favour of political reforms.

Sir Francis Buller, Sir Soulden Lawrence, and Sir John Heath were the three judges. Messrs. Mitford and Abbott conducted the case for the Crown. Mr. Plomer defended Father Coigley. Messrs. Ferguson, Dallas, Gurney and Scott represented the other four prisoners. The first day's hearing was devoted almost exclusively to choosing and challenging the jury, some of whom had seemingly already found all the prisoners guilty.

The Attorney-General late in the afternoon opened the case for the Crown with an eloquent speech that occupied the remainder of the day. The next day Mr. Plomer, for Father Coigley, asked to have the case adjourned because two of his Dublin witnesses, Mr. Valentine Derry and Mr. Bernard Coile, were not in attendance, but the Judges refused. Among the first of the witnesses called for the Crown were the two constables. They swore they were present when Mr. Twopenny was supposed to have found the treasonable letter in the pocket book; it was addressed from "the Secret Committee of England to the Executive Directory of France," and ran as follows:—

“CITIZEN DIRECTORS,

“We are called together on the wing of the moment to communicate to you our sentiments; the citizen who now presents this to you, and who was the bearer of them before, having but a few hours to remain in town, expect not a laboured address from us, but plainness is the great characteristic of Republicans. Affairs are now drawing to a great and awful crisis; tyranny, shaken to its basis, seems about to be buried in its own ruins. With the tyranny of England that of all Europe must fall; haste, then, great nation, pour forth thy gigantic force; let the base despot feel thine avenging stroke, and let our oppressed nation carol forth the praises of France at the altar of Liberty. We saw with rapture your proclamations. They met our warmest wishes and remove doubts from the minds of millions. Go on; Englishmen will be ready to second your efforts.

“The system of borrowing that has hitherto enabled our tyrants to disturb the peace of a whole world is at an end; they have tried to raise a kind of forced loan; it has failed. Every tax diminishes that revenue it was intended to augment, and the voluntary contributions produce almost nothing. The aristocracy pay their taxes under that mask, the poor workmen in large manufactories have been forced to contribute under the threat of being turned out of employ. Even the army has been called upon to give a portion of their pay to carry on the war; by far the greater part have refused to contribute to so base a purpose, and the few that have complied have in general been cajoled or reluctantly compelled to it.

“Englishmen are no longer blind to their most sacred claims; no longer are they the dupes of an imaginary constitution; every day they see themselves bereft of some part of the poor fragment of democracy they have

hitherto enjoyed, and they find that in order to possess a constitution they must make one.

“Parliamentary declaimers have been the bane of our freedom, national plunder was the object of each faction, and it was in the interest of each to keep the people in the dark; but the delusion is past; the Government has pulled off its disguise, and the very men who under the semblance of moderate reform only wish to climb into power, are now glad to fall into the ranks of the people. Yes! They have fallen into the ranks, and there they must ever remain, for Englishmen can never place confidence in them.

“Already have the English fraternized with the Irish and the Scots, and a delegate from each now sits with us. The sacred flame of Liberty is rekindled. The holy obligation of brotherhood is received with enthusiasm; even in the fleets and armies it makes some progress—disaffection prevails in both, and united Britain burns to break its chains.

“Fortunately we have no leader. Avarice and cowardice have pervaded the rich, but we are not therefore the less united; some few of the opulent have indeed by speech professed themselves the friends of democracy, but they have not acted; they have considered themselves as distinct from the people, and the people will in turn consider their claim to its favours as unjust and frivolous. They wish perhaps to place us in front of the battle, that unsupported by the wealth they enjoy we may perish, when they may hope to rise upon our ruin; but let them be told though we may fall through their criminal neglect they shall never hope to rise, and Englishmen once free will not submit to a few political impostors.

“United as we are, we only wait with impatience to see the hero of Italy, and the brave veterans of the great nation; myriads will hail their arrival with shouts of joy. This will soon finish the great cam-

paign, tyranny will vanish from the face of the earth, and, crowned with laurel, the invincible army of France will return to its native country, there long to enjoy the well-earned praise of a grateful world, whose freedom they have purchased with their blood. 6th Pluvisoie, A. R. P. G. (It was signed by L. S.)

The officers were also supposed to find two other cypher letters. One, dated from Whitstable, addressed to Mynheer van Solomon, Straet van Haerlem, Amsterdam, is as follows :—

“DEAR SIR,

“Happening by accident to be here, and hearing of a general embargo laid on all vessels in the Dutch ports, and a seizure of our new cargo there, I wish to be informed exactly by you, the more so as I am obliged to attend to my duty as a military man at present, *and my partner has a quantity of goods just ready to ship, and consigned to you.* This will be sent over by a careful hand, and the sooner you answer it the better for both parties; because if your answer should be favourable, we shall ship perhaps a treble quantity direct in all haste to Parkinson and Co., High-street, Manchester. We are very uneasy about the safety of the last parcel we sent over. Lose no time, I pray you. In the meantime,

“I am, yours sincerely,

“EDWARD WALLACE.”

Father Coigley's passport for a previous journey to France was also put in evidence; it describes him as being, in 1797, 35 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches in height, grayish hair and eyebrows, open forehead, moderate nose, blue eyes, middle-sized mouth, round chin, and a full, round face.

Then there came into the witness box a miserable spy named Frederick Dutton, at that time a Quarter Master in the Royal Irish Artillery. This creature had

formerly been a servant in the employ of Mr. Carpenter, of Armagh, but had been dismissed for an irregular longing that he had gratified for his master's plate. He swore that the two documents found in the pocket book were written by Father Coigley, and in reply to Mr. Plomer stated that when he was a jailer at Dundalk prison he had often seen the priest's writing. As an instance, he mentioned the case of one Coleman, who had been sentenced to transportation. The unfortunate prisoner had no goods to leave his wife, except an old silver watch. Father Coigley, after being assured that it was honestly come by, was asked to try to sell it. He suggested another way—namely, to get up a raffle; and as the poor woman was unable to write out the tickets he kindly did so for her, taking ten of them himself.

Oliver Carlton, a magistrate of Dublin, followed. He produced two letters, both of which were found at Leinster House, Lord Edward Fitzgerald's residence, Kildare-street, Dublin. One from Arthur O'Connor, addressed from London, was as follows:—

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“I have had a letter written to you this ten days, and have not had an opportunity of sending it to you. You cannot conceive how it vexes me not to be able to find a good way, or any way of getting Maxwell off; he has been most active in trying to get away from his creditors, but they so watch him, and this embargo by the enemy makes it most difficult, though I think he will be off in three days from this. It is said that Lord FitzWilliam is going over to Ireland; great hopes are entertained of separating the Catholics from the Union. This will be your and every honest man's business to prevent; and though a few of the old Committee Patriots should attempt it, the people are most honest.

"I received both your letters—one to Debreys and the one by the young men. I shall do all I can for them, and hope with effect, in three days; if that fails I will make it a point with Maxwell that he goes by Hamburgh; indeed he is in the greatest impatience to be off. The Man of Consideration told me he heard the Government here had intercepted a dispatch from France for Ireland, which promised great assistance. They are here in great consternation, the money and their commerce being very low. The black terrier and his little brother are both sorry curs; the latter has become a land broker, and if I am rightly informed has found the little priest, and the sugar baker and many others have sent him their money to lay out for them, and thus, to have their agent, they have been at work.

"Chevalier was the person who wrote to my friend to have nothing to do with Nicholson or her set, for they have completely fallen into contempt from the appearance they cut. I send you two copies of the pamphlet, but they must not be let out of the room you and Pamela read them in.

"Until you hear from me, as otherwise I shall be in Limbo, there is not one out here, nor will there be until I can do so in safety. You can have an edition printed in Ireland. I shall send you 100 copies, for the instant they are to be sold for three shillings and sixpence, and of course not to be given to any that cannot be depended on to avoid prosecution.

"The instant I get to Williams' you shall hear from me. I mean to be as active as I can. One of the copies is for Dowdall, and let him insert as much of it, or all of it, as he likes; he will observe the errata and corrections.

"I have not words to tell you how much I am concerned at Pamela's illness, but I hope and trust she is getting better. I send you a letter to M'N., and leave

it open so that you may see it. You can seal it, and send it to him, and send the money to Hugh Bell for me. Adieu, my dear friend, be discreet and on your guard.

“Yours ever most sincerely,

“P.S.—I have written to Emmet about your friend’s bail; he has adjusted his fortune so that you nor he can be put to any inconvenience for want of the money being paid.”

Mr. Hugh Bell was a great friend of O’Connor’s.

The Attorney-General then called for the key which was found in O’Connor’s dressing case. He sought to prove it contained the names and their cypher meanings, as for instance:—

France	was implied by	Williams.
Spain		Thompson.
Holland		Gray.
Brest		Lisbon
Texel		Emden.
Paris		This Place.
A Musket		A Nail.
Lord Edward Fitzgerald		O’Brien.

One of Father Coigley’s letters was also found, dated Dublin, January 14th, 1798:—

“CITIZEN,

“You will please to remain home to-morrow, as I intend to call upon you precisely at seven o’clock in the evening, to talk over the business of the letter and other affairs of that business likewise.

“JAMES COIGLEY.

“To Citizen Fitzgerald, commonly called Lord Edward Fitzgerald.”

Dutton, who was recalled, swore that this was in the priest’s handwriting.

A number of other witnesses also were examined, including Mr. Hugh Bell. He said that on one occasion when Arthur O'Connor and Father Coigley dined with him at his house in Charterhouse-square, they appeared to him to be almost strangers to one another; he also said that it was at his house that O'Connor engaged Father Coigley to act as the former's private secretary during his stay in France.

The witnesses for the defence were then called, but only one offered himself for examination in the interests of the patriot priest. This was Mr. Stewart, a magistrate of Co. Tyrone, who deposed that he was well acquainted with Father Coigley, and had a great respect for him, and he knew that the Peep-of-Day Boys, or Orangemen, had burnt down his father's house, for which damage the priest prosecuted them. The witness was asked by the solicitor for the Crown whether he was a member of the London Society of United Irishmen. Mr. Stewart's answer was that he was not, but a great number of his closest friends were. A copy of the declarations used by that Society was then put in. As it is now forgotten I give it as a curiosity:—

“London Society of United Irishmen.

“I do hereby certify that has
been duly elected, and having taken The Test provided
by the Constitution, has been admitted a Member of
this Society.

“W. HUBARD, *Secretary.*”

Cornelius Kettle swore that the carrier, Thomsett, in a conversation with him, had said that Pitt, Dundas, and White were employing him and had promised him £6 6s. a month if he would help to swear away the lives of the Irishmen.

But if only one Irish witness was called on Father Coigley's behalf some of the greatest orators spoke in favour of Arthur O'Connor. The Right Hon. Francis

Rowden, Earl of Moira, came to declare his admiration of him. Lord Chancellor Erskine protested that his sentiments were his own, and considered him incapable of a dishonourable action; he himself had advised him to go to France. Charles James Fox had known O'Connor for a number of years, and, according to Lord Cloncurry, was fully acquainted with his mission to France. Richard Brinsley Sheridan had often spoken to him on Irish politics. They agreed in their detestation of the Tory administration. Grattan, who came over specially for the trial, declared that he admired and honoured O'Connor. The Duke of Norfolk considered that there was no difference of opinion between Mr. O'Connor and himself, so did Lord John Russell, afterwards Duke of Bedford, Lord Oxford, Lord Thanet, as also did Mr. Samuel Whitbread, and many others. The prisoners were asked if they would like to make any statement supplementary to the witnesses that had been called.

SPEECH OF FATHER COIGLEY.

Father Coigley, who spoke first, said:—"My Lords and Gentlemen of the Jury, as I cannot prove a negative, I think it a serious duty I owe to myself, to my country, and to you, in the awful situation in which I now stand, to declare to you under all the solemn impressions of that situation that I never was the bearer of any former address from any man or body of men, in this country or my own, to the Executive Directory of France, and that the absurd and contemptible paper which is made the ground of the present serious charge against me is not mine. Upon the very face of it, it was intended to be taken to France by some person who was the bearer of some former address. I repeat, gentlemen, I was not the bearer of that address, or any other. If I had been, that, although it was impossible for me to prove the negative, was a fact clearly capable

of positive proof on the part of the prosecution, but that has not been proved, because it was not the fact.

"I must also warn you with the same solemnity that I am not, nor ever was, a member of a political society in this country. If I had been, and that also was a provable fact, but has not been proved on the part of the prosecution, although the contrary is incapable of proof on mine. Gentlemen, with these few observations arising not only from the facts, but also from the evidence, I consign myself with confidence to your justice. You will acquit yourselves as Englishmen to your own consciences, country, and your God."

Binns, Arthur O'Connor, and Allen also replied; the bold Jeremiah Leary, a lad about 17, contented himself with saying:—"My Lord, they may do what they like with me."

THE JUDGE'S SUMMING UP.

Mr. Justice Buller then summed up in a speech that did not suggest he was an embodiment of justice. He extolled the King for his goodness, meekness and mercy. At this Father Coigley took a pinch of snuff, with a very emphatic "hem." The Government were determined to have a victim, and Father Coigley was chosen. Against him, therefore, the judge directed the greater part of his thunder, Arthur O'Connor and the other prisoners receiving only small share of it. It was close on midnight when he had finished, and the obedient jury were directed to withdraw and consider their verdict.

THE VERDICT.

After an absence of thirty-five minutes they came into court with a verdict of "guilty" against Father Coigley, and "not guilty" against O'Connor, Binns, Allen and Leary.

Judge Buller then pronounced the awful and

barbarous sentence for high treason—viz., “That you will be taken from hence to the place from whence you came, and from thence you will be drawn in a hurdle to the place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck, but not until you are dead. But that you be taken down again and while you are yet alive your bowels be taken out and be burnt before your face, and afterwards your head be severed from your body, your body be divided into four quarters, and your head and body be at the King’s disposal, and may the God Almighty have mercy on your soul.”

The prisoner listened attentively to the dreadful sentence, and bowed respectfully to the court. In that awful time he did not appear at all agitated, but, on the contrary, firm and sincere to his principles.

EXTRAORDINARY SCENE.

As soon as Mr. Justice Buller had pronounced sentence of death against the saintly priest a very uncommon occurrence took place in the court. Two Bow-street officers who had been stationed there for that purpose, attempted to seize Arthur O’Connor, who was yet at the Bar. This was prevented by the court, but some minutes afterwards they attempted it again. Mr. O’Connor then got in the body of the court, on which a number of peace-officers rushed in and the court was thrown into the utmost confusion. Two swords that were lying on the table (part of the prisoners’ baggage) were drawn, and several people were struck with them.

By this time Arthur O’Connor was seized and dragged back again to the bar. When order was restored he applied to the court for protection.

A warrant was then produced dated March 22nd, 1798. His counsel said that he had been already tried on that warrant. The court argued that they had no power, their authority having ended with the commission. Arthur O’Connor then spoke out and said,

“Will the officers take their hands off? If I am again to be confined, may I not beg the indulgence of being sent to the same place as my brother? I have seen swords drawn upon me in this court; I am not afraid of death; if I am to die, let me die here; life is not worth holding on the terms I now hold it, for I must waste it out in loathsome dungeons; another confinement will be fatal to me.”

Having finished he was remanded back to the custody of the jailer—Binns, Allen and Leary being liberated in the morning. After leaving Maidstone an abortive attempt was made to rescue Arthur O'Connor by the Earl of Thanet and Mr. Ferguson, but it failed owing to the strong guard that was placed over the prisoner. The would-be rescuers were afterwards sentenced to suffer a year's imprisonment in the Tower of London, and pay a heavy fine.

THE MARTYR-PRIEST IN PRISON.

Of Father Coigley's behaviour in prison even his bitterest foes speak well. Firm and unbending in certain matters that concerned himself and his politics, he was kind and forgiving to others. Many attempts were made to get him to incriminate Arthur O'Connor, even the English priest was induced to ask him to make a public confession. Prohibition of Holy Communion was resorted to by the authorities, and various other cowardly inducements were attempted to make him betray his brother-leader. During his imprisonment he wrote a short account of himself and his family, from which we learn that his great-grandfather fought on the Irish side at Derry, and it was he who invented and constructed the famous boom at Fort Culmore, which long prevented the English ships from coming up the river Foyle. Four of the family were killed at the battle of Aughrim. Father Coigley's father was a plain, honest farmer of Kilmore, Co.

Armagh; a very kind, hospitable man, Catholics and Protestants alike speaking well of him, so much so that it was to his many kindnesses that he owed his life on more than one occasion. I will transcribe a passage from Father Coigley's own memoir to show what the Catholics of that time had to put up with:—

“This Church and King-mob calling themselves Orangemen commenced their bloody system of sacking my father's house about two years ago. My helpless, hoary parents, the younger of whom is 77 years, carefully avoided even the semblance of resistance by throwing open the doors and windows at their approach; yet they wantonly fired a hundred shots into the house, one of which slightly grazed my father's head. My mother fell seemingly lifeless on the spot; my father they immediately took prisoner, and hauled out of his own house, and with blunderbusses directed to his head and breast vehemently threatened his life if he did not immediately swear to recant the errors of the Church of Rome. Though in such a perilous situation, with his usual fortitude he boldly refused to comply; one of the Orangemen then spoke on his behalf, telling the mob of his many kindnesses.”

According to Mr. W. J. Fitzpatrick, in his “Life of Lord Cloncurry,” it was this outrage that drove Father Coigley to join the Northern Society of United Irishmen.

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

On May 29th Father Coigley wrote an address to the People of Ireland. He first of all speaks to the Catholics of Ireland, and then addresses the Dissenters, very many of whom he knew personally. He recommended to their care his old father “now on the verge of fourscore. In his day he was braver than any of his children; and now I trust he will glorify the Lord

that he has had a son not unworthy of him, being murdered for the cause of God and his country." He goes on to tell the Irish people always to "proudly proclaim themselves the Sons of Erin," and when courage and bravery are requisite to act as Irishmen United.

He elsewhere justly praises the Dissenters of Belfast—those big, "respectable," virtuous and enlightened men who were always kind to the little priest, and asks them to erect a simple stone in the town with merely his name on it. (This, if it has not been done already, ought certainly to be erected this year, the centenary of his death.)

On Wednesday evening, June 6th, 1798, he wrote to Mr. Foulkes, the solicitor that Lord Cloncurry had kindly retained for him, as follows:—

"MY DEAR FOULKES,

"I have just received notice that my execution will take place to-morrow morning at 11 o'clock. Receive my last lines, my last thanks. Had it been my lot to have lived longer I should have had the pleasure of cultivating the acquaintance of a man who has so generously come forward in the cause of suffering humanity, and has discharged his duty in a manner so honorably to himself, and so characteristic of the former inhabitants of this country. But alas, they are no longer what they were—vice and corruption predominate. May Almighty God bless and protect you from the envenomed malice of all your enemies. May you ever be well as I wish you, is the last prayer and blessing of your injured and unfortunate friend,

"J. COIGLEY."

In the "Maidstone Journal" of June 1st there appeared an article dealing with the trial, in the course of which the writer referred to Dutton, the informer, being an Irishman. This produced a most indignant

letter from the condemned priest, in which he says—
 “From the manner you have particularized him, calling him with emphasis an Irishman, and for so doing you certainly had no authority. . . . Nay, restore him to his rank in the world, and rob not a great nation of the honour of his birth. Yes, Mr. Printer, Mr. Frederick Dutton, gentleman, is a true born Englishman; his family reside as yet in the place of their nativity, not even fifty miles from Maidstone.” This letter was addressed to Mr. J. Blake, the printer and publisher of that paper.

THE EXECUTION.

On the morning of the 7th of June his solicitor had a last interview with him. He then complained of not sleeping, as two jailers had been keeping a noisy watch in his room, but otherwise he appeared perfectly tranquil. At a quarter past eleven the big gates of the prison opened, and Father Coigley, bareheaded, was seen by the multitude chained to a hurdle, to which two horses were harnessed. Headed by a body of sheriff's men, and guarded by 200 of the Maidstone Volunteers, the cavalcade moved slowly through the streets of the town to Penenden Heath, which is about a mile as the crow flies from the jail. The day was hot and the roads very dusty, therefore it is no wonder that when the place of martyrdom was reached Father Coigley appeared faint and sick. On being unchained he stood up, and joined in some prayers with a brother priest, who was in attendance. In a few minutes he took from his pocket an orange and tried to peel it, but as his hands were bound this was a work of difficulty. Beckoning to a friend, whom he called Valentine Derry, and who was allowed to accompany him, he said “Open this orange with my knife; it has been said that they would not trust me with a penknife, lest I should cut my throat, but they little knew I would not

deprive myself of dying in this way." His friend having given him a piece of the fruit, he desired him to keep the knife in remembrance of him. He then said more prayers, after which Derry gave him another piece. Having eaten this, he bade him farewell. He also shook hands with the head jailer, Mr. Watson, and thanked him for his many kindnesses. He then mounted the ladder, still with unshaken courage. As the executioner placed the rope around his neck, the man muttered what seemed like an apology. But the priest replied, "Say nothing, you must do your duty." When the rope was round the beam, and with his hands tied, Father Coigley addressed the multitude in a short speech. He again protested his innocence in the most solemn manner, and desired them all to pray to God "to grant me grace to support me in this moment, and to enable me to die in a manner worthy of my integrity."

This he spoke in a firm voice, so as to be easily heard by all present. Having finished he turned to the executioner, saying "I am ready," but the rope had got shifted in the course of his speech, and had to be again adjusted—a work of minutes. During the fearful time his countenance, even according to unfriendly witnesses, was perfectly calm and fearless. When the cap was drawn over his face he made signs as if he wanted Mr. Derry to approach, in order to give him some last message, possibly for the loved ones in Ireland. But this request was denied him, so, bowing, he dropped his handkerchief—the sign to the executioner. The bolt could not be drawn, therefore the period of his torture was not yet over; but no trepidation could be discovered in either limbs or muscles of the dignified, muffled figure. At last the bolt was pulled away, the treacherous platform fell, and the body of a martyred Irish priest remained hanging for a space of about fifteen minutes. The head was then severed from the

body by a surgeon of the town, and afterwards held up by the executioner. The rest of the barbarous sentence was, by order of the King, not carried out. The trunk and head were subsequently placed in a shell or rude coffin and buried at the foot of the scaffold.

CONCLUSION.

Lord Cloncurry's account of the martyred priest is—that the excesses of the Orange faction at Dundalk, where, as we have already said, Father Coigley was Prison Chaplain, drove him to accept a professorship at the Catholic University at Douai, in France; that on his journey he had to stop in London, during which time he was so poor as to be without food, and was reduced to begging; that being in this piteous plight he sought aid of Lord Cloncurry, bringing an introduction from Mr. Mathew Dowling (who afterwards earned distinction by aiding Rowan in his escape, and by giving the signal to Napper Tandy to be off); that his lordship invited the priest to dinner, at which he met Arthur O'Connor, who, when informed of Father Coigley's miserable state, suggested that he should become his secretary for the time being. Afterwards, when the arrests took place, Father Coigley proposed to his employer that they might sacrifice him without scruple, if in that way their safety was secured, and as Lord Holland remarks in his "Memoirs of the Whig Party," "Arthur O'Connor religiously complied with the arrangement." Some colour is lent to this supposition, for it had been sworn that the only coat the fishermen had seen Father Coigley wearing was a light grey one. At any rate Lord Cloncurry and Wolfe Tone ever afterwards shunned O'Connor, whose after-history may be summed up in a few words:—Being expelled from Ireland, he went to France, and lived the rest of his life a general in the

French service. Of Valentine Lord Cloncurry's behaviour nobody can speak ill. He and his friends it was that found the funds to defend the ill-fated priest, and I suspect it was to him, in the name of "Valentine Derry," that Father Coigley tried to address his last words. But there appears no record of this, at least as far as I can find. It is evident, however, that Lord Cloncurry must have felt the terror which is unavoidable when we see an innocent victim offered. Courts of Equity, according to Blackstone, were instituted because the law, by reason of its universality, is likely to overlook the circumstances of particular cases. A little before Father Coigley suffered in Maidstone guiltless beings were sacrificed in Paris. There panic was supreme; it was also influential in the Maidstone Court House, and made a martyr of Father James Coigley. But we may humbly hope he has received his reward from that Infinite Pity which rectifies so much evil which poor humanity perpetrates. But his countrymen should not ignore what he suffered, and if this very short memoir has done anything, however slight, to rescue from oblivion one of Ireland's '98 martyrs I shall feel I have not made my weak effort in vain.

